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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000221

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: IRAQI PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS UPDATE PART 1:
TECHNICAL PREPARATIONS

REF: A. A. 2007 BAGHDAD 3442
[1](#)B. B. 2007 BAGHDAD 3459
[1](#)C. C. 2007 BAGHDAD 4142

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Ellen Germain for Reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Post believes nationwide provincial elections can occur in 2008. Technical preparations for elections are broken down into three areas: voter registration, Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) capacity building, and Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) capacity building (including training of polling officials.) Each of these areas is underway -- the former being more advanced than the latter. IHEC believes that elections could be held within 120-160 days of the passage of an election law. Post believes that even though that estimate may be optimistic, provincial elections can take place in 2008. This is the first in a series of cables describing the process and preparations, both technical and political, needed to hold provincial elections. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) This cable draws from conversations with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), and the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) board of commissioners.

VOTER REGISTRATION

[1](#)3. (C) The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) purchased the Public Distribution System (PDS, which is the nationwide food ration distribution system) data base and, with International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) technical assistance, has converted it into a draft voter registration data base (reftel). Even though the PDS data base has only rudimentary geographic information (essentially the province in which the PDS cardholder and his family live), it also contains information on the particular geographic food distribution center to which the family is assigned. IFES reports that it is possible to use this information to develop voting districts. Currently, IHEC is asking each food distribution center for the number of people it serve. This information will be cross-referenced with the location of the centers in order to determine which geographically linked centers could be joined together to form a voting district. Each district would have a similar number of voters, but would not necessarily fall within the current kada and nahiya political districts. While imperfect, this proxy districting mechanism will make for better representation and more accountability because elected officials will stand for election in provincial constituencies instead of for at-large seats, as they did in [1](#)2005. Once the security situation permits, a census would need to be completed in order to re-draw districts with proper electoral boundaries containing equal populations, which would then be used for future provincial elections.

14. (C) The voter registration data base is ready for vetting at a provincial level. IHEC plans to distribute the registry to each province for a "display period". The entire provincial registry will be posted at voter registration centers such as schools and citizens will be able to check the list for their names and inform the Governorate Electoral Officer of those they know have died or moved from the area. There may be some incentive to keep "ghost" names on the list; citizens may believe that any name taken off the voter list would be sent to the Ministry of Trade, which oversees the PDS list, resulting in a reduction in their family's ration. Thus there is strong incentive to keep dead family members on the PDS roll. This will need to be addressed in IHEC's public outreach efforts and the Iraqi public convinced that -- as is indeed the case -- the voter registry information will NOT/NOT be passed back to the Ministry of Trade in order to update the PDS. The IHEC leadership reports that after passage of an election law containing voter eligibility criteria such as length of residency and where internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees would vote, the voter registry display period can commence. UNAMI Chief Electoral Officer Sandra Mitchell believes that IHEC could proceed with the registry display period earlier if the Council of Representatives (CoR) were simply to decide eligibility requirements and inform IHEC of them even before actually passing the law. (Comment: While this is in theory true, given the lack of political consensus in the GOI and CoR, it is highly unlikely to happen.)

IHEC CAPACITY BUILDING

15. (C) As part of its USAID contract, IFES is not only

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working with IHEC to develop a voter registration data base, but also helping it gear up for the entire electoral process.

Key areas include designing a ballot and creating media campaigns such as voter registration drives. IFES employs a Public Outreach Advisor who is helping with such campaigns. In addition, IFES is bringing in a Systems Administrator to assist IHEC in designing and maintaining a computer system that will help with communications and coordination in the field. IFES is also helping with such basics as how to determine staffing needs and budgeting requirements in an election year. UNAMI is working with IHEC on mechanisms to ensure free and fair elections, including the training of elections monitors.

GEO TRAINING

16. (C) Much of the work in preparing for and actually implementing the elections will be done at the governorate level through the Governorate Electoral Offices (GEO). The GEO will be responsible for registering political parties and candidates, determining the location of polling stations, setting up security, and overseeing vote tabulation. UNAMI and IFES will both be working with the GEOs on this. Currently, 13 of the 20 GEO Chief Election Officers (CEO) have been appointed. The final seven appointments are stalled due to political maneuvering (refs B and C). The law states that either the CoR or the provincial council may submit five candidates to IHEC, which will then choose one of them as CEO. The CoR has now stated that of the five names submitted to IHEC, IHEC should choose a CEO, two deputies and two advisors, thus selecting all five candidates. So far, IHEC has refused to do this. While the drama of the CEO selection continues to unfold, IFES has plans to bring together those CEOs who have been appointed, along with governorate-level elections commission staff, for training in February. Post also plans to bring together PRT election/governance advisors in February to discuss protocols for local-level engagement and assistance on election issues.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) After discussions with USAID and IFES, post believes that nationwide provincial elections can take place in 2008. The training currently being provided will enable the provinces to hold technically acceptable elections. The real issue is the political preparations needed to ensure these are credible elections whose results reflect the will of the people. End Comment.
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